

CHANGES IN FAMILY LIFE

The Questionnaire of the London School of Economics

SINCE certain irresponsible sections of the daily Press tried to create a sensation by attacking this questionnaire, readers may be interested to know the principal facts about it.

The London School of Economics wished, as part of its ordinary work, to establish certain 'norms' for the English family, and especially to discover how far its constitution and habits had changed during the last two generations or so. It was decided to adopt the questionnaire method of investigation, since it had been successfully employed, for the same purposes, in several foreign studies, and is in this country a normal practice in the study of disease. The questions to be asked in this case, however, were about the normal activities of normal people.

The B.B.C. was approached and, realizing that the inquiry was of cultural value and public interest, agreed to devote a few brief talks to describing the objects and value of the questionnaire, and also to do the 'donkey-work' of distributing and collecting the forms. That is the whole story: the enterprise has no more governmental sanction than had Father Ronald Knox when he gave (with the assistance of the B.B.C. engineers) his famous description of a revolution in London. Moreover, it can scarcely be called a "snooping," "amazing inquisition," an "impertinent inquiry," or a "searching census such as no Government has dared to conduct" (see daily Press for these descriptions), to issue

an invitation to those who are interested in assisting sociological studies, to answer whatever questions they like, and to return their forms in such a way as to ensure complete anonymity.

This *Society* was invited to comment on the details of the questions, an invitation it gladly accepted since the inquiry promised to throw much light on many of the problems of eugenic research. It will indicate, for instance, what interchange between social classes has taken and is taking place; how far mating was and is affected by such factors as parental influence, social tradition, and the like; the extent of involuntary infertility and of voluntary restriction of births; the inheritance of longevity and fertility; and much more. In so far, too, as the other more strictly sociological questions widen our knowledge of family life, they will inevitably assist the human geneticist to obtain a deeper and juster view of the environmental background of his material.

Fellows and members of this *Society* should have already been asked to reply to the questionnaire, and any who have not received copies can obtain them direct from the B.B.C. They can rest assured that they will be serving the cause of eugenics in doing so, and will probably find the filling up of the form an interesting and not very laborious task. It took the present writer a little under an hour to answer most of the questions, and the remaining details were supplied by the family over coffee after dinner.

E. M.